

“Our Business Has Added Greatly to the Happiness of Women of Springfield”

by Dee Nelson

.....So reads an advertisement in the May 2, 1926 Illinois State Journal for the Edwards & Chapman Laundry & Dry Cleaning, the thriving establishment at 101 West Cook Street and the present day *Vinegar Hill Mall*.

Founded by H.C. (Kelly) Edwards and Al W. Chapman in 1904 at 512 E. Monroe Street, the business was moved to Cook Street in 1909 to a small two story structure in the northeast corner of the existing mall. Towards the ceiling you can still see some of the original assembly line track used to pull the laundry in big tubs across the building.

Across the street, on the east side of First Street, were the stables which held twenty-five head of horses used to pull the laundry carts on their weekly routes throughout the city. The carts were driven into the laundry by way of a loading dock just north of the original structure.

By 1925, two additions were added, the first being a donut shaped courtyard enclosing the original structure where employees would “take respite” as the laundry carts bustled by. The second addition was on the east side of the complex: the ground level was expanded and a second story added. The second floor was built by Mr. Chapman as a residence for himself and his family. His suite featured an open air balcony on the Cook Street side and a number of ornate fireplaces.

Specialty services included detachable collars, two cents; cleaned and starched dress shirts, twelve cents; shoes cleaned and polished (inside and out), twenty-five cents; the cleaning of wool blankets in coconut soap for thirty-five cents each and a special fur storage process:

“Furs are place in the smaller vault as soon as they are received and prepared for storage. They are fumigated with a special process, after all the dust is removed with compressed air or bamboo sticks. They are then allowed to remain in this smaller vault for a limited time when they are placed in the larger vault, with a capacity of 3,500 garments. This large vault is fumigated every sixty days. This process actually makes possible a guarantee against moths or other fur damage.”¹

In 1927, Edwards sold out to Chapman. At that time the laundry had nearly 300 employees, having grown from fifteen employees in 1904

In 1951, Chapman closed the laundry’s doors for the last time, as the newly established self-help laundries had caused a downward trend in business. By 1952, the Springfield Towel and Garment Service, a division of F.W. Means occupied the building. In 1972, B.D. Hunter of Springfield bought the business for the purpose of restoration which was not begun until 1981. In 1983, the first restaurant within Vinegar Hill Mall opened.

All references courtesy of Sangamon Valley Collection, Lincoln Library, Springfield, Illinois
Text by Kathleen Moloney
IL State Journal, May 2, 1926
IL State Register, November 6, 1935
State Journal-Register September, 26, 1982

¹ IL State Register, November 6, 1935